

Media Release

For immediate use



Parkinson's NSW

DASH to the InfoLine

Parkinson's NSW officially launches initiative supporting the mental health of people living with Parkinson's disease

November 2009: Parkinson's NSW is hosting a series of seminars throughout November and December to officially launch a brand new initiative - DASH to the InfoLine.

The seminars have been designed to educate doctors and medical professionals about the innovative InfoLine - developed to improve the quality of life of people living with Parkinson's disease. The seminars are taking place across NSW in Coffs Harbour, Wollongong and Orange.

When people think of Parkinson's disease they often imagine someone with tremors and limited mobility. However **depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance** and **hallucinations** (DASH) are equally common symptoms.

As with the physical indicators of Parkinson's disease, the DASH symptoms are stigmatised but their hidden nature presents an entirely different set of challenges. The InfoLine will offer support to the many different groups affected directly and indirectly by the disease - highly trained operators will be on hand to listen and to offer advice and strategies for dealing with these symptoms.

Parkinson's NSW, in conjunction with the Brain & Mind Research Institute at the University of Sydney, developed the InfoLine in response to an increasing body of evidence which suggests that the DASH symptoms can drastically reduce the quality of life for people living with Parkinson's disease. Stressful and debilitating for any sufferer, when linked to Parkinson's disease these symptoms can signal the initial stages of cognitive decline and dementia.

Dr Simon Lewis, Neurologist and Director of the Parkinson's Disease Research Clinic at the Brain & Mind Research Institute, advocates raising awareness about these lesser known symptoms amongst health care professionals and people living with Parkinson's disease.

"Addressing the non-motor features of Parkinson's disease such as the DASH symptoms and changes in memory and thinking is clearly important given their significant impact on quality of life," says Dr Lewis.

"Not only do people with Parkinson's disease have to deal with symptoms such as rigidity, impaired balance and coordination, difficulty chewing and swallowing, tremor, loss of spontaneous movement and impaired speech, they also have psychological symptoms. However, once identified, these symptoms can be managed using both drug and non-drug treatments which can lead to an improved quality of life for people living with the disease," he said.

"On a professional level, DASH to the InfoLine aims to highlight these red flag symptoms," says Miriam Dixon, CEO of Parkinson's NSW.

"It will also provide information to people living with Parkinson's about these symptoms and encourage them to seek further support or information."

Everyone who calls **DASH to the InfoLine** will receive information about managing the DASH symptoms of Parkinson's disease. For more information, phone 1800 644 189.

This initiative is funded through the Federal Government Dementia Community Grant Program.

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CASE STUDY

Myra Chalmers, 82, was the sole carer for her husband, Ron, for 11 years after his initial Parkinson's diagnosis. He often experienced depression and anxiety, exacerbated by violent nightmares and hallucinations.

"As a carer you do what you can to make life easier and more comfortable for people living with Parkinson's disease," says Chalmers.

"If you understand why these symptoms are occurring and how to manage them better, it becomes easier for the person with Parkinson's, their carer, friends and family to cope with the disease and its debilitating effects."

ABOUT PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Parkinson's disease is a chronic, progressive and incurable disease with substantial disability. It is one of the most common neurological conditions in Australia, second only to dementia. There are an estimated 80,000 people living with Parkinson's in Australia.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Please note that Dr Simon Lewis (Neurologist and Director of the Parkinson's Disease Research Clinic at the Brain & Mind Research Institute), Miriam Dixon (CEO of Parkinson's NSW), Myra Chalmers (case study) and other local case study subjects are all available for interview.

Media are welcome to attend the upcoming seminars in Wollongong and Orange.

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